



Washington State Department of Agriculture News Release

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Big reduction in Spartina infestation in north Puget Sound and Hood Canal

OLYMPIA -- Washington is winning the battle against the noxious weed Spartina in north Puget Sound and Hood Canal.

That is one of the primary messages in the 2003 progress report on Spartina eradication sent to the state legislature last month by the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA).

This past year, for the first time ever, all three major Spartina meadows in south Skagit Bay were treated according to Kyle Murphy, the department's statewide Spartina program coordinator. The three meadows are located in southeast Skagit Bay, Leque Island, and Mystery Island. More than 400 solidly infested acres were treated, far more than any previous year.

Of the 1,000 acres of the weed existing in 1997 in north Puget Sound and Hood Canal, Murphy reports that 250 acres have been eradicated. The rate of reduction should increase now due to the amount of acreage being treated, he said.

Murphy said state and local officials believe it is possible to eradicate Spartina in north Puget Sound and Hood Canal within eight years.

WSDA is the state's lead agency in the fight against Spartina in state waters.

Spartina is an aggressive noxious weed that displaces native vegetation, destroys shorebird and wildlife habitats, and severely threatens the state's shellfish industry.

Murphy said the program succeeded in 2003 as a result of increased funding, improved tools, continued cooperation between all entities in the Spartina fight, increased public awareness of the issue, and continued adherence to an *integrated pest management (IPM)* approach to eradication.

In north Puget Sound and Hood Canal, Murphy praised the work of Skagit, Snohomish, and Island County noxious weed boards, Swinomish tribal community, People for Puget Sound, The Nature Conservancy, University of Washington Olympic Natural Resource Center, Washington State University, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, and WSDA.

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“Spartina reduction would not have occurred without these people,” he exclaimed.

Murphy said 99 percent of the north Puget Sound and Hood Canal infestations are located in three counties -- Snohomish County (370 solid acres), Skagit County (350 solid acres), and Island County (35 solid acres). Smaller infestations are located in Jefferson, Kitsap, Clallam, King, and San Juan counties.

Agencies conducting the treatments in south Skagit Bay this past year were the Snohomish and Island counties noxious weed boards, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, and WSDA.

Murphy said approximately \$3.2 million was spent treating Spartina infestations in Washington in 2003 -- approximately \$2.2 million coming from state funds and \$1 million from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Adequate funding is necessary to continue the fight against Spartina, Murphy said.

Murphy pointed out that Spartina infestations in Washington waters are found in four areas -- Willapa Bay, Grays Harbor, north Puget Sound, and Hood Canal. “One of the reasons we’ve had better eradication success in north Puget Sound and Hood Canal is that the infestations in these areas are less established and require less overall resources to treat,” he said. Willapa Bay infestations are older, larger, and more established, and therefore more difficult to eradicate, he said.

The Spartina experience underscores the need to address invasive species sooner instead of later, Murphy stressed.

Persons with questions on the state’s Spartina eradication program may view WSDA’s 2003 progress report to the state legislature at WSDA’s Web site at www.agr.wa.gov, then click respectively on “Plants and Insects” and “2003 Spartina Report to Legislature” under Hot Topics; or contact Murphy by phone at (360) 902-1923; by e-mail at kmurphy@agr.wa.gov; or by FAX at (360) 902-2094.

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